



FrontLineSupervisor

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A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

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<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eap.html>

■ **I have referred many employees to the EAP, but now I think I could use the program. As a supervisor, I've become bored with my job. I don't have the same spunk that I used to, and I don't sleep well either. But boredom isn't something that the EAP can "fix," is it?**

Your feelings of boredom may be a symptom of a larger issue the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you examine. Supervisors must see themselves as individuals with the same psychological challenges as other employees, as opposed to somehow being immune to those challenges. If it turns out that you are simply bored and burned out by your job, the EAP can provide a supportive outlet for you to strategize and apply solutions. Depression, stress, or another condition could manifest itself as boredom or lethargy. You may feel ambivalent about using the EAP, even after years of referring employees who have benefited from the program. The decision to remain isolated and deal with problems without outside help or support has sometimes been referred to as the "Lone Ranger Syndrome" in EAP literature. Do yourself a favor and call the EAP.

■ **I work with a colleague who gets under my skin. He's always subtly criticizing me. Everyone thinks he's so polite; I'm the only one who sees through him. How can I fight back without making matters worse?**

Be careful. Taking a misguided stab at retaliation could wind up working against you. For example, it's common for people in your situation to start bad-mouthing the perpetrator. But, speaking negatively about someone behind his back only makes you appear less than trustworthy. As long as he takes jabs at you in private—and doesn't try to embarrass you in front of your supervisors or peer—then disarm him with polite but firm directness. Ask, "Do you have some feedback for me on my performance?" If he says no, then respond, "Well, if you ever have any concerns or criticisms, I'd like to hear them." This direct approach frequently hits its mark with those who do not communicate evenhandedly or in healthy ways. Meanwhile, don't worry about everyone else's perception of him. You do not know what they really think.

■ **The EAP has been available here for years, but I've never heard any feedback from employees who have used it. Since no one really talks about it, how can I tell if it is helping the employees I send?**

Because the EAP is by definition a confidential service to employees, you're not going to be able to track its impact by the number of personal problems that have been resolved. But you can monitor the EAP's influence by focusing on the job performance of those individuals whom you referred to it. Keep a close eye on both quantitative and qualitative productivity measures that are related to each employee's job responsibilities and output. Examples may include a reduction in absenteeism, serving a higher volume of customers per hour with fewer complaints, or processing more claims with a lower error rate. This is the measure of success that EAP would like you to notice. If you provide employees with regular feedback

on their performance, then it will become clear during your formal and informal appraisals of their work to what extent they are improving and overcoming any issues that previously stood in their way.

■ **My employee shows signs of paranoia. By my referring him to the EAP, is there a risk that it will reinforce his sense that I'm out to get him?**

The best way to proceed is to keep timely and thorough documentation of the employee's behaviors. Share your written observations with the EAP, and discuss your concerns about the employee. You can then make the referral with peace of mind in the knowledge that the EAP is well informed of the situation. Your job as supervisor is to keep good records and consult with the EAP—not to diagnose employees or give them medical advice or psychological counseling. If you think an employee might benefit from the EAP, but are reluctant to make a referral because you fear the employee's adverse reaction, the wisest approach is to contact the EAP first. Some supervisors find it hard to refer an employee who seems emotionally fragile, being fearful that it will make things worse. But, such inaction rarely works to either the employee's—or the employer's—advantage.

■ **I supervise about 20 employees, and frankly, some of them can't stand my supervision style. Others like my style a lot. Is there any way to get every employee to like a supervisor? Or is it a given that some employees will always dislike me?**

Rethink your goal. Strive to earn everyone's respect, even if they do not like your style. Most experienced supervisors would agree that if all 20 workers liked you, it would be a red flag. It could mean that you're too soft or accommodating. The best supervisors set high standards and motivate employees to exceed their expectations. They also recognize superior effort while pushing underperformers to excel. Expressing criticism and taking disciplinary steps are part of every supervisor's job, along with enforcing unpopular policies and conveying bad news from senior management. Faced with having to perform so many unpleasant tasks, it's no wonder that supervisors are sometimes unpopular with employees.

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